

## The Church's Cornerstone

A big question Christians face today is “Why is our amazing Jesus not received, loved, and served by every informed human being?” The same question challenged Christians in the first century, to whom Mark was writing. Our text in this study helps us answer this question. Jesus had, the previous day, cleansed the Temple by overturning the tables of the money changers—tables which had been approved by the religious leaders of Israel. He is then confronted by the religious authorities about this incident.

### Mark 11:27-12:12

**27** And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, **28** and they said to him, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” **29** Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. **30** Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.” **31** And they discussed it with one another, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ **32** But shall we say, ‘From man?’—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. **33** So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

**12:1** And he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. **2** When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. **3** And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. **4** Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. **5** And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. **6** He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ **7** But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ **8** And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. **9** What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. **10** Have you not read this Scripture:

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

**11** this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?”

**12** And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.

Let's make four observations from this text.

### 1. Authoritative moral judgments offend sinners (11:27,28)

It is generally true that as fallen humans we don't like to be corrected. And, as we can see in the text, the more influence and power we have, the less we like it. We see throughout Mark 11 and 12 that Jesus provokes the various authorities of His day (cf. 11:27;12:13,18,28). The message of the Kingdom today also provokes the powers that be. The question “By what power...?” is very similar to the question posed to Eve by the serpent in Gen. 3:1.

### 2. Jesus Christ is the preeminent moral authority (11:29-33)

Jesus answers their question with a question, because He knows that their ultimate objection is not to His actions the previous day in the Temple, but to the authority of God. So He asks their opinion about John's baptism—from heaven or from men? They know they can't answer that question for political reasons, but Jesus would have them know they can't answer it for spiritual reasons: they are in rebellion against the authority of God. It is this rebellion that is behind all of our attacks upon the authority and authenticity of the Scriptures. It is this same rebellion that fuels our culture's moral relativism and religious apathy.

**3. Rebellion against God's authority leads to highly destructive behavior (12:1-8)**

Jesus then tells a parable that immediately reminds his audience of Isaiah 5:1ff. It is also a story that reflects current reality in Palestine, for many vineyards were owned by foreign landlords who hired workers for their vineyards. The owner first sends his servants to collect from the vineyard and they are mistreated by the workers. He then sends his son, and the workers, thinking they can gain control of the vineyard, kill the son. The analogy is obvious to all: Israel has always abused God's prophets (called "servants of God" in the O.T.), and now the religious leaders want to kill God's own Son. In our own unbelief, we do the same thing.

**4. Our destructive behavior leads to our own destruction (12:9-12)**

Jesus then asks, "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" He will obviously punish the perpetrators of such wickedness. Jesus then explains from Ps.118:22 that the very one rejected by the religious leaders is the one God has appointed as the cornerstone of His Temple.

What can one do, then, who has sinned against this great Messiah? The amazing thing about this text is the great event which follows it: the voluntary crucifixion of Christ on the cross in order to pay the penalty for the tenants' rebellion. Rather than coming to judge us or to execute us for our treason, He comes to die for us. What a gracious Savior!

**Discussion Questions**

1. What are the protected practices or attitudes in our lives that Jesus might "turn over" because they tempt us to challenge His authority?
2. How can we come under Jesus' authority? How can we stay there?
3. What are the ways in which our culture seeks to undermine Jesus' authority? What should we do about that?
4. What examples can you think of in the Old Testament that fit Jesus' parable? What examples in our own society are described by this parable?
5. What lessons should we learn from Mark 12:9?
6. What are the implications of Jesus being the "cornerstone?"

**Going Deeper**

1. What are the most common ways in which you question or challenge or ignore Jesus' authority in your life? What should you do about it?
2. What does today's text teach you about how to deal with those who oppose Christ's Kingdom authority?